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ABSTRACT

The roles of state boards of education, state education agencies, and chief state school officers are examined. A review of governance models beginning with colonial days and ending with consideration of recent research on the functioning of state boards of education is provided, and it is concluded that state boards have wide discretionary powers, but are constrained by a lack of financial and political influence. This finding contradicts the traditionally held view that educational policymaking is apolitical and autonomous. State boards' limited access to resources significantly impedes the extent to which they influence policy. It is clear that the roles of the state board of education, the chief state school officer, and the state education agency continue to evolve and to be intertwined. What is not clear is whether these entities as now structured are suitable for exerting state educational leadership in the 21st century. Two tables are included. (23 references) (LMI)

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The Evolving Roles of State Boards of Education, State Education Agencies and Chief State School Officers

By

Patricia F. First, Ed.D.

and

Russell J. Quaglia, Ed.D.

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The Evolving Roles of State Boards of Education, State Education Agencies and Chief State School Officers

By

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THE EVOLVING ROLES OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION, STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES AND CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

PATRICIA F. FIRST, ED.D.

AND

RUSSELL J. QUAGLIA, ED.D.

Introduction

In this era of frantic educational reform, it is instructive to consider the evolution of the agencies where the responsibility for reform follow-through really sits. Administrative control of education has cycled from direct control by the general government, that is, the legislature of a state; to control released by the legislature to an established special government, that is state boards, chief state school officers, state education agencies, and now to an era where control has been retrieved by the general government.

Given the complexity of our era, however, the furor in the legislature over educational matters will wane and on the shoulders of the state education actors will rest the success or failure of the reform movement. The state education entities now assuming this responsibility have evolved on individual timelines in the various states. State education agencies, state boards of education and chief state school officers can now be grouped into eleven governance models in the fifty states. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1

Description of Governance Models*

Model	Description	# of States
I	Board elected in partisan election Chief appointed by the board	6
II	Board elected in non-partisan election	5
III	Board elected in partisan election Chief elected in partisan election	1
IV	Board elected by joint session of the state legislature Chief appointed by the board	1
V	Board elected by state legislative delegation (plus 1 governor's appointee)	1
VI	Board elected by local district boards Chief elected in partisan election	1
VII	Board appointed by the governor Chief appointed by the board	14
VIII	Board appointed by the governor Chief elected in partisan election	13
IX	Board appointed by the governor Chief appointed by the governor	6
X	Ex Officio Board Chief elected in partisan election	1
XI	No state board Chief elected in partisan election	1

* Models I, III, VII, VIII could be further divided into state boards which have 1 to 3 ex officio members and those that have none.

Note. From "An Historical Examination of State Educational Agencies" by P.F. First, *Thresholds in Education*, XI 1985a.

In every state in the United States, the state education agency is the professional arm of the state board of education and the chief state school officer. Although their histories are long, over most of their existence, state boards of education and chief state school officers have had only small professional staffs engaged chiefly in collecting statistics. As late as 1900, there were only 177 professionals in all state departments of education combined. (Beach and Gibbs, 1952). But today these agencies in the progressive states are generally well-staffed and ready to provide leadership. Because of the intertwining of their governance roles, the history of the state education agencies, the state boards of education and the chief state school officers is treated together.

In this article, the history of the state education agency will be examined in each phase of its relationship with the general government, beginning with colonial days and ending with consideration of the present status as governors and legislatures are staying actively invovled in education policy making. This examination will be followed by a report of the findings of recent research on the functioning of state boards of education.

Control Residing in the General Government

The U.S. Constitution made no mention of education and left that function to the various states. Most states provided that common schools were to be established in each town or district, with most of the support coming from local taxes, a practice that led to the strong tradition of local control of schools. As concern for the welfare of the public schools increased, separate structures for their governance were created. At

the local level, this led to separating school committees from town councils. At the state level, it led to the creation of the state agency (Campbell and Mazzoni, 1976). The Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York was established in 1784, and was the first special structure for education governance at the state level. At that time, the Regents had jurisdiction only over academies and colleges. Supervision of the public schools was added to their responsibilities in 1904 (Cubberly, 1927).

The most significant move toward establishing a state board of education for the public schools was the creation of the Massachusetts State Board of Education in 1837. The governor, the lieutenant-governor, and eight citizens appointed by the governor for eight-year staggered terms comprised the board. Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, made the state board of education and the state superintendency respected and necessary agencies for education and for government (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan, 1985). Through revisionist historians such as Katz (1982) and Spring (1980) have questioned the motives of the early school reformers, Mann's achievements are still generally recognized.

By 1890, thirty-four states had established state boards of education (Keesecker, 1950). Originally, many of these boards were composed completed, or in part, of ex officio members. However, turn of the century reformers call for the separation of education and politics (Wirt and Kirst, 1982). Most states eventually removed all or most ex officio members and provided the state board seats for lay citizen involvement in educational policy making.

The creation of the office of chief state school officer in some cases preceded and in some cases occurrred concurrently with the establishment of state boards of education. In 1812, New York was the first state to establish the post of chief state school officer, but for a time the office was displaced. Therefore, the post of

superintendent of common schools, established by Michigan in 1829, was the first such state office created which has continued to the present time. Between 1830 and 1850, the office of chief state school officer was established in most states.

Control Released to the Established Special Government

During the twentieth century there have been many changes in the state governance of education. All states except Wisconsin have established state boards of education with jurisdiction over elementary and secondary schools. All states have chief state school officers. The number of professional personnel in state education agencies has increased enormously (Campbell and Mazzoni, 1976).

The structural arrangements of state boards vary. In 1988 board members in 33 states were appointed by the governor; in twelve states they were elected by the people; and in four states they acquired office in other ways, such as appointment by the legislature or legislative leadership or local boards (CCSSO, 1988). The number of board members varies from six to twenty-one and terms of office range from four to eleven years. All state boards of education are responsible for the general supervision of elementary and secondary education and most are additionally charged with responsibilities for vocational education and vocational rehabilitation. A few are responsible for higher education, such as the powerful Board of Regents in New York.

In twenty-seven states the chief state school offier is selected by the state board of education and serves as its executive officer. In the remaining states the relationship of the chief officer to the state board of education is less well defined and there is more possibility of role confusion (Campbell et al., 1985). Sixteen chiefs are

elected (ten in partisan elections) and seven are appointed by the governor (CCSSO, 1988).

From about 1900 to 1930, state departments were primarily engaged in the inspection of or the enforcement of standards (Beach and Gibbs, 1952). State department staffs, therefore, grew in size because the inspection of practices in local school districts required more state department personnel than did the collection of simple statistics from those districts.

About 1930, state departments of education entered a leadership phase and began providing service in the form of expertise to individual school districts. Campbell and Mazzoni (1976) state that although the extent to which state education agencies have provided leadership in education over the past several decades may be in question, there is no denying the fact that the agencies have taken on additional functions, greatly increasing the size of the professional staffs in the process. Most of the impetus for staff increases came from sources external to the state education agency, such as demands for school finance reform and accountability, thereby increasing the need for more information and better analyses and federal aid to states for categorical programs, beginning with vocational education in 1917 and rapidly expanding during the 1960s with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Bailey and Mosher, 1968). Title V of that Act was designed to improve state departments of education and to encourage many departments to do more than they once did in planning, research and evaluation.

Twenty years ago state education agencies were perceived to be mismanaged organizations staffed by soon-to-retire school superintendents (Murphy, 1981). The impetus from Title V resulted in modernization, expansion and improved professional standards. State education agencies have generally become more progressive and

their managerial capacity has been markedly improved (Sherman, Kutner and Small, 1982).

Control Retrieved by the General Government

State education agencies today serve two major functions (First, 1985b). One role is administrative and the other is that of policy formulation. Like their histories, the policy-making roles of state education agencies are entwined with the policy-making roles of the state boards of education and chief state school officers and are exercised through relationships with governors and the legislatures, as well as through actual formulation of policy.

During the 1980's governors and legislatures became more actively involved in educational policy making. The actual powers of educational special governments are dependent upon constitutional mandate and statutory provision. No matter which form the special government has taken, the state education agencies, state boards of education and chief state school officers are still creatures of the general government, the legislature. The state legislature retains plenary power for education. The legislature may create special machinery, may charge state boards and state superintendents with particular functions, as it has done, but it may also alter the machinery and call back the functions (Campbell et al., 1985).

If state education agencies are to increasingly affect policy and rise to the leadership challenge in their history, the governors and the legislators must be influenced (First, 1979). But interest groups also have an impact upon the policy development systems and provide an arena for the leadership of state education agencies. The most common groups represent teachers, school administrators and local school boards. However, more specialized education and non-education

interest groups such as those representing business, labor, agriculture, ethnic groups, and the like, also take positions on education policy questions and must be heard.

In recent years state level educational governance has become the focal point of educational reform. A wide variety of political, economic and social forces have been responsible for shifting the initiative in education policy formation away from local and federal actors to state level policy systems (Mitchell and Encarnation, 1984). These forces include the need for more money for education, the demand for accountability, growing teacher power and the deliberate decrease in the federal role which was debated during the Nixon and Carter years, swiftly implemented by the Reagan administration, and thus far not changed by the Bush administration.

The Present Situation

There is currently an abundance of action at the state level. Governors are directly involved in educational policy making, as witnessed by President Bush's education summit with the governors in Charlottesville, Virginia in the fall of 1989, and legislators are seeking quick solutions to problems in schooling. Amidst the dangers of inappropriate measures being passed into law, there is a leadership vacuum that state education entities in the progressive states are ready to fill. Those state departments with strong departments of planning, research and evaluation are staffed with the professionals whose expertise and leadership are critically needed to guide the educational reform movement of the 1980's to a successful conclusion in the 1990's.

But educators are increasingly asking what are these state education entities really doing. The role of the state boards of education seems particularly vague. What do state boards of education really do?

It is used to be said that modern state boards served to insulate education from the dirty world of politics. Recall that at the turn of the century, the tie between education and politics was widely recognized, widely reviled, and state boards of education were invented to "correct" the problem. But the reform decade of the 1980's has once again made it obvious that education is just one more resource to be allocated, and that the provision of education is undeniably political.

State boards were, and are, composed largely of lay members and "lay" was intended to mean non-political, but let's look again at how most state board members obtain their seats. Gubernatorial appointment can hardly be called non-political. Neither can membership by partisan election (7 states). Combine this political activity with the equally political mechanisms for obtaining chief state school officers (16 elected, 10 in partisan elections, 7 appointed by the governor, and 27 appointed by the state board), and the myth of non-political lay control of educational policy making at the state level is exposed. Guthrie and Reed comment, "However effective such arrangements have been in providing the public with the illusion that education and politics are separate, it has made for cumbersome governmental arrangements (1986, p. 36)."

The State Boards of Education have been characterized as weak policy actors, primarily because of their inability to hire or remove the Chief Officer who has major constitutional oversight of state education. That inability may be political rather than legal, but it is, nevertheless, real. The State Boards of Education are also often poorly staffed or organized to operate effectively and often lacks political lines to the legislature and the governor. "They seem to wander about in the wilderness while the battle is being fought on a plain somewhere else" (Wirt & Kirst, 1989, p. 287).

Even granting the intertwining of the policy making roles of state boards, chiefs, and state agencies, and granting the complexity of state level policy making, it does not appear that state boards are major contributors to governance systems. Some recent research supports these doubts. For one year, July 1988 to July 1989, the authors read the agendas, minutes and information packets from state boards of education in four states: Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, and Washington. Their interest stemmed from witnessing the creation of the Maine Administrator Certification Act and their study of the development and implementation of that Act (First and Quaglia, forthcoming).

Studying Maine's act prompted an interest in the broader question of how state boards accomplish policy making; i.e., do they do it in some systematized way in which current knowledge and research in the field of education is utilized. It was anticipated that analysis would show well developed policy development processes and evidence of policy review cycles being followed (First, 1979). As an "ideal" for comparison purposes, policy making information distributed to state boards by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) was used.

After immersion in a year's worth of materials, it was apparent that before answering the question of how competently policy making was being done by these boards, a much more basic question first had to be asked about these boards: what, in fact, were they doing? Whatever it was did not look to us like policy making (i.e., endorsing the National Bicentennial Competition, deciding on teacher of the year). So, what were they doing, did it need doing at all, or, at least, did it need doing by this governance layer called a state board of education, or could it be done more efficiently with savings in time and money by other policy players already in place in the respective states.

Ewald Nyquist wrote in 1975, "To go right to the heart of the matter, every board gets the agenda it deserves. The consideration of policy issues and the making of policy are the prime reasons for the existence of state boards of education . . . . agendas will be filled either with trivia or important matters depending upon how carefully meetings are prepared for. The fact of the matter is that if a board wants to be concerned with policy questions and assuming it has a competent Commissioner and staff, the way to do it is to be certain that it commits enough of its time and staff resources specifically to the issue of considering policy questions." This excerpt may simplify the matter. Each of the boards we looked at is somewhat constrained by the specific responsibilities assigned to it in the legislation which created it.

Among the four boards there were differences in the completeness and professionalism of the minutes and packets. There were some references to policy development processes, but little evidence of results of these processes. In two of the states there were reports of goals and objectives for the year, strategic plans as it were, but even these did not rise to the level of far-reaching, creative or disciplined policy making. In one of the states which sets goals for the year, some concerned educational issues but these were listed along with goals for hosting a National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) Convention. Virtually all the goals actually listed by the school boards were immeasurable. There were many references to NASBE and its meetings, who was to attend, who was to be nominated for this office or that honor, but no evidence that the excellent materials from NASBE on the policy making capabilities of state boards were being consulted.

State board members receive many, many reports (i.e., at-risk students, adult education, early childhood curricula). While they seem to be flooded with information, the minutes, which are after all the official records of their proceedings, provide little evidence that this flood of information resurfaces in thoughtful policy making. Task

forces are created, blue ribbon committees are recommended, reports are received and transmitted to other committees and more task forces are created to further study the problem. When one follows the torturous trails to some conclusions, almost always the matter is referred to state legislatures. It must be asked why such matters could not have gone to these duly elected representatives of the people in the first place, for the underlying research will be done yet again by legislative staffs or consultants brought in for the specific issue.

All four boards are dealing with pretty much the same business. It is administrative and regulatory and this supports Sam Harris' 1973 remark that "The tendency of state boards of education to become too involved in administration and less attentive to, and hence less competent and comprehensive in important legislative and policy-making responsibilities is a problem in many states." When these boards vote, most of the action falls into the categories listed in Table 2. While policy making is one of these categories, in our analysis, actions fell into this category infrequently.

There are reasons for types of agendas. In at least one of these states, legislative curtailment of board policy making in the early years of the Board's existence negatively affected adventurous policy making. Also, much real policy making goes on behind the scenes and we would not naively suggest supporting the notion that all of the activities listed in Table 2 are unimportant. Granted, some trivia is required to keep the wheels of government moving. However, our data moves us toward the opinion that state boards of education are not required in order for the business of education to go forward. There are a number of questions. Can education chiefs handle blatantly administrative items? Do governors need state boards to suggest the formation of blue ribbon panels? Are state boards of education a redundant layer of government in which their activities constitute "much ado about nothing?"

Table 2

Categories of Typical State Board of Education Actions

- Procedural items, such as approval of their minutes, acceptance of financial reports, travel plans, their own rules (making and suspending them) statements of their own activities, board elections and NASBE activities.
- Public relation items, such as awards, commendations, thank you's correspondence of a ceremonial nature.
- Personnel functions, such as appointments, transfers and resignations.
- Approval of plans, grant applications, regs and mor regs (their creation and amending).
- Motions for the CSSO to proceed, transmit, investigate, discuss, report back, etc.
- Formalization of certification actions.
- Approval or just acceptance of priorities and plans from various programs in the state department. Varying among the states, these corresponded to specific requirements of state legislation.
- Adoption of legislative proposals and budget proposals from the Chief.
- Adoption of a policy which is intended to give direction to the schools of the state. The best examples of these are policies evolving around the certification of teachers and administrators.

The reality is that state boards of education today operate under real constraints which prevent taking active roles in state policy making. Some of these constraints are:

- Boards have essentially no accepted route to the state's resources.
- While policy determination is explicit, most boards have no legislative powers. State legislatures enact education policies as the 1980's proved.
- Board members at the state level typically have little influence with either the governor or the legislature as sources of information, advice, and policy. The chief state school officer is more often the person to whom the other actors on the education policy-making scene turn for information.

Experts question whether state boards of education or chief state school officers exert more influence in policy-making arenas. Most often it is the chief state school officers and their staffs that formulate board meeting agendas and supply nearly all the information related to agenda items. Judging from the perusal of the agendas from these four states, the chiefs are keeping their boards very busy, but it can be questioned whether there are policy implications in the "busyness." Contributing to the power of the CEO's is that many board members appear to make little effort to have input on the agenda or to react critically to the material that is presented them (Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976). What Friedrick (1941) has called the "rule of anticipated reactions" still operates in state board of education-chief state school officer relationships. What the chief state school officer does in preparing the agenda or

developing information is based to some degree on his/her anticipation of what board members want or need. Summerfield (1971) describes the same phenomenon as "cuing."

Campbell and Mazzoni did a case study investigation of three issue areas in which state boards of education make policy decisions: certification, school desegregation, and education program improvement. In studying the respective policy roles of the boards and chief officers, they found that the basic policy-making functions of initiation, formulation, and support mobilization were largely exercised by the chief state school officers and their staffs. State board of education members sat on policy-oriented committees or task forces and gave formal approval to the major decisions (Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976). They found it hard to identify many clear-cut examples of state boards actively involved in the performance of policy-making functions other than formal legitimation. It appears to us that their conclusion continues to be valid today based on our recent examination of the minutes of these state boards.

It may be helpful in this discussion to remember that any group's policy influence is contingent on access to resources that can be drawn upon to command, persuade, or bargain in the course of a decision process. Additionally, it is instructive to remember in this context that it is in the legislature that power really lies, no matter how extensive the policy-making authority of a state board may appear. As evidenced in the states under study, the legislature can disband, at will, the existence of their state boards.

Legally, it is the boards, not the chief state school officers, that have most of the authority for the governance of elementary and secondary education in the states. Only in California is there any marked deviation from the prevailing legal pattern whereby the chief is largely dependent on state board authorization for the power to govern the schools. In implementing their charge of general supervision over

elementary and secondary education, state boards are usually allowed broad discretionary powers. State boards appropriately set policy in such areas as professional certification, district organization, pupil assignments, education standards, school sites and buildings, and federal assistance programs. Again, the question arises, are the state boards in a position to facilitate implementation when they have no money, little direct power, and a growing lack of respect? Influence with the legislature is the critical factor in whether or not state boards of education really set policy. Other factors are the opinions, assertiveness and knowledge of governors, the power of the interest groups, and the legacies of the eighties reform movement.

In the late 1960's Sroufe inferred that "state boards of education, rhetoric to the contrary, have little capability as actors in the education policy making system of the state" (1971). Campbell and Mazzoni later reached the same conclusion about education policy making in the ten states they studied. The policy-making of the ten boards of education were marginal in the legislative arena, and the boards were overshadowed by the chief state school officers in the agency arena (1976). The results of our recent, as well as others mentioned, contradict the traditionally held perspectives that education policy making is apolitical and operates in a state of considerable autonomy through the efforts of state boards. All the more recent evidence suggests that state boards of education lack policy influence (Wirt & Kirst, 1989). In a ranking of policy influentials in six states, state boards of education were placed in the "far circle," as opposed to the chief state school officer in the "near circle" and the legislators as "insiders." (Marshall, Mitchell & Wirt, 1990)

It is clear that the roles of the state board of education, the chief state school officer and the state education agency continue to evolve and continue to be intertwined. What is not clear is whether these entities as now structured are suitable for exerting state educational leadership in the 21st century.

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